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<Rethinking Tariqa: What Makes Something Tariqa?> Editor's Note

AUTHOR(S):

TONAGA, Yasushi

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Editor's Note

TONAGA Yasushi*

In our research so far, we have gathered a lot of information about various Tariqas (*turuq*). However, I wonder if we can yet convincingly explain how and what Tariqas were or are in general. There are still many questions to reflect on.

The first question which arises is, when we use the word “Tariqa” in our academic discussions, is this the word that is actually used in our original texts or in our field? This question reminds us to consider whether we are using the word as a substantial concept or an analytical one.

The second question is about the relationship between Tariqas and Sufism. Are Tariqas really always related with Sufism? We can readily call to mind the argument about whether ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, the distinguished eponym of the Qādirīya Order, was really a Sufi.¹⁾ If he was not, we should consider that one of the most famous so-called Sufi Orders was founded by non-Sufi.

The third question is whether we can really identify Tariqas as a kind of organization. We tend to imagine a hierarchical organization when we hear the word “Tariqa.” Is this true through the long history of Tariqas and throughout the Islamic world? It may be better to grasp this notion as “trend” without concrete organizational form in some cases, especially in the pre-modern period.

In order to answer these questions, I organized a workshop entitled “Rethinking Tariqa: What Makes Something Tariqa?” which was held at Kyoto University, Japan on the 12th and 13th of October, 2007. This was one of the activities of “The Research Project on Sufism, Saint-veneration and Tariqa,” which has been active for more than 10 years supported by grants-in-aid from The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (1997-2003), Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (2003-2007) and NIHU Program: Islamic Area Studies (2006-, still ongoing). Prof. AKAHORI Masayuki of Sophia University, Japan and I have led this joint research project with the much appreciated assistance of several Japanese scholars in an interdisciplinary atmosphere. When we began this interdisciplinary research project, we modelled it on the French enterprise which had already succeeded in its joint project. We are fortunate to have been able to collaborate with our French friends including Prof. Thierry ZARCON and Prof. Alexandre PAPAS, who have both contributed to this special issue, for these last five years. The five articles contained in this special issue are based on their writer's own presentations in the workshop which I mentioned above.

In this joint research project we have deconstructed many concepts which up until now had been generally accepted. My own humble task of undertaking the deconstruction and

* Deputy Director, Center for Islamic Area Studies at Kyoto University and Associate Professor, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University.

1) Although he is the eponym of the Qādirīya order, some scholars claim that he himself was not a Sufi. See J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 40-41; J. Chabbi, “‘Abd al-Kadir al-Djilani, personnage historique,” *Studia Islamica*, 38(1973), pp. 65-106. Andre Demeersemann, *Nouveau regard sur la voie spirituelle d'‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (sic.) et sa tradition*, Paris: J. Vrin, 1988 was a counterargument to this, and the controversy surrounding this matter has yet to be resolved.

reconstruction of the notion of Sufism is one of the outcomes of this project.²⁾ On the occasion of this workshop we tried to deconstruct the notion of “Tariqa.” We did not, however, intend by doing so to introduce a useless disorder into the academic argument, but in order to stand at the starting point to answering the big question of what makes something a Tariqa. We decided to begin by asking which elements are indispensable for Tariqas. We did not seek a definition of the word itself to avoid a kind of essentialism. The most important elements of Tariqas such as lineage, eponym and ritual, are well known. We asked whether Tariqas really did have such elements and also whether any other indispensable elements could be added.

The first paper “No Sufism without Sufi Order: Rethinking *Tarīqa* and *Adab* with Ahmad Kāsānī Dahbidī (1461-1542)” by Alexandre PAPAS insists that the institution of the Tariqa is inseparable from the ideal of the ‘Tariqa’ based on Kāsānī’s treatises on his own Sufi order.

Next paper entitled “ ‘Tariqas’ without *Silsilas*: The Case of Zanzibar” by FUJII Chiaki showed a special case of Tariqas in Zanzibar, which lack the element of *silsila*. The author claims that the most important element for them is *dhikr* (*zikri*) rituals.

The third paper “Institutionalized Sufism and Non-Institutionalized Sufism: A Reconsideration of the Groups of Sufi Saints of the Non-*Tarīqa* Type as Viewed through the Historical Documents of Medieval Maghreb” by KISAICHI Masatoshi, challenging the J. S. Trimingham’s generally accepted model of the developmental stages of Tariqa, proposes the categorization of the Sufi-saints groups into several different types based on the historical documents of medieval Maghreb.

The fourth paper entitled “To Whom Do You Belong?: *Pīr-Murīd* Relationship and *Silsila* in Medieval India” by NINOMIYA Ayako, begins by pointing out the fact that the word “Tariqa” did not appear in the Persian texts of medieval India, and goes on to analyse the Sufi lineages known as *khāndān*, *khānwāda*, *silsila* etc. She points out that *silsila* is just an idea shared by particular people and direct *pīr-murīd* relationship played a much stronger role in the formation of the group.

The fifth and last paper “Anthropology of Tariqa Rituals: About the Initiatic Belt (*Shadd*, *Kamar*) in the Reception Ceremony” by Thierry ZARCONÉ draws the readers’ attention to the major role played by the ritual of girding on the belt (*shadd*, *kamar*) in the reception ceremony in Turkic and Persian Sufi lineages. This shows the author’s new approach to the Tariqa’s elements.

Here we will return to the first questions about Tariqas. On the first question of the distinction between substantial and analytical concepts of the word, FUJII and KISAICHI distinguish between these two notions in their articles. PAPAS and ZARCONÉ use the notion only substantially, and contrarily NINOMIYA uses it only in an analytical sense. We should give our full attention to this distinction in our future discussions.

For the second question about the relationship between Tariqas and Sufism, only FUJII presents a special case where there is a lack of this relationship. We would like to continue to

2) See TONAGA Yasushi, “Sufism in the Past and Present: Based on the Three-axis Framework of Sufism.” *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 21/2 (2006), pp. 7-21.

examine whether this is an isolated case or whether we can find more cases in the other parts of the Islamic world.

As for the third question concerning the organizational nature of Tariqas, PAPAS and KISAICHI point out the existence of non-organizational types of Tariqas. Even though they admit this nature exists, KISAICHI and NINOMIYA make some limitations in their application.

We should also examine the elements of Tariqas in each paper. The element of lineage was not emphasized by PAPAS, and FUJII goes one step further by insisting on the lack of this element in some Tariqas. KISAICHI also points out the lack of this element in the case of 'local orders.' NINOMIYA emphasizes *pīr-murīd* relationship rather than *silsila*-lineage.

Every paper points out the important rituals as an essential element. Among these ZARCONI's highlighting of the ritual of girding on the belt is evaluated as a new finding.

"What is Tariqa?" or "What would be an adequate definition of Tariqa?" is a formidable and difficult question. In order to give a satisfactory answer we should first investigate many topics. Apart from lineage, organization and ritual which I have mentioned in this note, we can count such topics as doctrines, social and political activities, financial basis, economic activities, historical development/stages, typology, identity of the members of so-called Tariqas, perceptions of the outsiders and those in the later period. It will take a long time indeed to investigate these questions and synthesize an idea of Tariqa. I hope this special issue will be accepted as a first small step towards accomplishing this significant task.